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A BUSH-LEAGUE ASIDE VAULTS AN ONLOOKER INTO THE CAMPAIGN'S GLARE

(By Adam Clymer)

I have been writing newspaper articles for four decades. Broadcasting has never tempted me, except for bit parts on such sober outlets as C-SPAN and WQXR-FM. So what was I doing with an invitation to appear on the "Late Show With David Letterman"? And seriously thinking about doing it, before saying, no thanks?

I am used to being around big news. Checking out the posters in Red Square when Nikita S. Khrushchev was ousted. Sitting with Lyndon B. Johnson (and his dogs) when he congratulated Mike Mansfield on the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Standing on the White House lawn when Richard M. Nixon quit. Elections, trials, Supreme Court confirmations.

But being the story is different from observing it. And last week, I seemed to be the story.

On Monday, Gov. George W. Bush spotted me at a rally in Naperville, Ill. Not realizing the microphones were working, he told his running mate, Dick Cheney, that I was a "major-league [expletive]."

This was hardly the first time I have been attacked, though it was the first time the attack accorded me "major league" status.

It is true that I never made the Nixon enemies list; a deputy press secretary to whom I complained said all that proved was that he had nothing to do with compiling it.

But after Vietnamese and Chinese students beat me up in Moscow to cap a demonstration against the United States bombing of Vietnam, the Soviet government expelled me as a "hooligan." A deputy of Sheriff Jim Clark in Selma, Ala., once slapped me (because of an embarrassing article Jack Nelson of The Los Angeles Times had written; I hardly resemble Mr. Nelson, but maybe all newspaper reporters look alike to racists). The Washington Times has called me unpatriotic, and some people at The Weekly Standard have attacked me in print, too.

But those attacks all came from the ideological fringes, and nobody took them seriously. Maybe Mr. Bush is entitled to more credence. After all, I sometimes vote for his party's candidates, as I sometimes vote for Democrats. He cares about education and wants his party to attract African-Americans and Hispanics. Sure, he is not as centrist as he tries to portray himself, but then what politician is? (The pre-nomination Joseph I. Lieberman, maybe.) In any case, Mr. Bush is no right-wing nut, so shrugging his remark off as the sound of an extremist was hardly the proper response.

Initially, there was only a moment to think of a response when a pack of reporters descended. One smart-aleck answer occurred to me. Since we were not too far from Wrigley Field, I thought of saying something like, "At least I didn't trade Sammy Sosa," a riposte that would have dealt with Mr. Bush's own major-league experience as boss of the Texas Rangers. But I rejected that and said simply, "I was disappointed with the governor's language."

When reporters asked what he had against me, I suggested they ask him. He was not saying anything, except, "I regret that a private comment I made to the vice-presidential candidate made it to the public airwaves."

After that, I tried to fade into the background, which is how newspaper reporters try to work, as much as you can around a presidential campaign that has dozens of photographers and television cameramen following every move. I was in Illinois to cover

Mr. Cheney, and when we walked to an El entrance where he would be photographed taking a train, the lenses were on me, not him.

Suddenly my voice mail at the office was full. It was Labor Day, and I seemed to be the news flavor of the day. Radio stations in Phoenix and Scotland, Seattle and Australia, the BBC and a sports network said they needed me to fulfill their commitments to informing their listeners and viewers. Among those calling were "Good Morning America," CBS's "Early Show" and CNN's "Larry King Live."

I had plenty of time to listen to the messages because Mr. Cheney, anxious to avoid the storm Mr. Bush had stirred up, did not want to talk on the record to the reporters traveling with him. So I could not ask the question I had traveled to ask, about why he gave only 1 percent of his income to charity.

Almost all the phone calls were either invitations to speak, which I ducked, or encouraging, even envious, messages from friends. "Can I have your autograph?" asked one New York Times Colleague. "We're so proud of you," said a Democratic friend in Austin, Tex. Republican friends chimed in, too, to insist that their party was no monolith on the subject of Adam Clymer. But e-mail was a different matter. A right-wing Web site posted my e-mail address and urged its army to charge, so about 300 hostile messages flooded in and choked the system.

The next day I went back out with Mr. Cheney, and he discussed and defended his contributions. On a flight to Allentown, PA., he said he should be given credit not just for direct donations but also for corporate matching grants and speaking without charge to nonprofit groups. Television viewers might have expected glares, and at least some reference to the events they were being shown over and over, which includes his loyal agreement with Mr. Bush. Instead I asked questions, some of which he seemed to dislike, and he answered them as he chose. Not buddy-buddy, but strictly professional.

The Cheney entourage caught up with Mr. Bush, so his vice-presidential candidate could introduce him in Allentown, Bethlehem and Scranton. Every time we stopped near a television set, some cable channel was showing the clip of Mr. Bush muttering about me to Mr. Cheney and then pondering its impact on his campaign and the future of Western civilization.

By Wednesday the e-mail flood was drying up, although I was asked to endorse a T-shirt memorializing his comment, and someone else sent a message saying that an Internet site for my fans was being created.

I was back in the office, and colleagues asked if Mr. Bush had apologized to me. I had not heard from him, or from his aides, who were busy telling reporters I had been mean to him when I reported in April that "Texas has had one of the nation's worst public health records for decades," and that Mr. Bush had not made much of an effort to fix things.

I was actually proud of that article—which got immensely renewed readership last week as people tried to figure out what exactly was bugging the governor. But if Mr. Bush did not like it, hey, it's free country. After all, if newspaper reporters wanted to be loved by their customers, we could drive Good Humor trucks.

Newspapers reporters aren't immune from talking into an open mike either. About 18 months ago, I was editing an article describing how hard Mr. Bush was working to study national issues. With feeble gallows humor, I suggested that perhaps he needed the tutorials more than others. But while my comparable slurs of President Clinton, to cite one prominent example, stayed private, a spectacular typesetting blunder got my wise-

crack printed. Through an Editors' Note, the Times apologized, sort of.

Now maybe Vice President Al Gore, whose aides seem delighted by this business, could do me a favor and make some comparable stumble. Then I could get back to covering the campaign instead of being part of it. ●

A TRIBUTE TO SPECIAL AGENT
GEOFF YEOWELL

● Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I would like to take a moment to recognize my Legislative Fellow, Geoff Yeowell, who will be leaving my office at the end of the month to assume the duties of supervisory special agent for the Naval Criminal Investigative Service Office in Rota, Spain.

Geoff has been on loan to my office from the Naval Criminal Investigative Service where he has worked since 1987.

Over the past 11 months, Geoff has become an indispensable part of my legislative shop. He has worked hard on a broad range of issues—each time jumping in feet first, soaking up knowledge, and moving legislation forward in this often complicated process. From his first assignment, he earned the respect of my staff, as well as mine.

Geoff's primary duty consisted of working as my legislative assistant for Military Construction. He quickly realized the Milcon appropriations priorities for my home state of Pennsylvania and was helpful in making sure these items were given the time and attention they deserve.

Geoff also provided a tremendous service to the people of Pennsylvania in working with those in need of assistance. He demonstrated a remarkable amount of patience and courtesy with each constituent requiring special assistance and worked countless hours to help them in the best way possible.

Finally, Geoff was instrumental in working on the Counterintelligence Reform Act of 2000 (S. 2089) which I introduced on February 24, 2000. His skills and judgement in this arena are exceptional. My staff and I were constantly impressed with the wealth of knowledge he demonstrated.

His dedication to each project was remarkable, and the assistance he provided to my office will not be easily matched. However, I am informed that for Geoff this level of dedication is par for the course. In 1999 he was selected as a Naval Investigative Criminal Service agent of the year and received the Navy Meritorious Civilian Service Award for his work on a major espionage investigation. He also received the 1999 Department of Defense Counterintelligence Award for Investigations.

Mr. President, I urge my colleagues to join me today in commending Special Agent Geoff Yeowell for his service as a Legislative Fellow and for his dedication and leadership to our country. ●